

## HOW TO HANDLE DISCUSSION PROBLEMS

<i>If a Worker Is:</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>What You Can Do About It</i>
<b><i>Overly talkative</i></b>	<p>Worker may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an “eager beaver”</li> <li>• a showoff</li> <li>• just naturally wordy</li> <li>• or very well informed, sincerely interested, and eager to share information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t be embarrassing or sarcastic—you may need this person’s contributions later on.</li> <li>• Slow the person down with an assignment (like taking notes or demonstrating something).</li> <li>• Interrupt with: “That’s an interesting point...what do the rest of you think of it?”</li> </ul>
<b><i>Highly argumentative or obstinate</i></b>	<p>Worker may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• naturally combative</li> <li>• a “professional heckler”</li> <li>• unwilling to budge in his/her opinions</li> <li>• or normally good-natured, but upset by personal or job problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep your own temper firmly in check, and don’t let the group get excited either.</li> <li>• Honestly try to find merit in one of the person’s points (or get the group to do so). Then move on to something else.</li> <li>• When the person makes an obviously incorrect statement, ask what the rest of the group thinks. Let them point out the error.</li> <li>• Talk to the person privately to find out what’s bothering him or her. See if you can win his/her cooperation.</li> </ul>

<i><b>If a Worker Is:</b></i>	<i><b>Why</b></i>	<i><b>What You Can Do About It</b></i>
<i><b>Too helpful</b></i>	<p>Worker may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attempting to gain favor</li> <li>• or just trying to help, unaware that he/she is actually making it difficult for others to participate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Cut across” the person tactfully by directing questions to other people.</li> <li>• Thank the person, and then suggest that “we put others to work.”</li> <li>• At an appropriate time, ask the person to help you summarize the material that’s been covered.</li> </ul>
<i><b>Rambling</b></i>	<p>Worker may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talk about everything but the subject</li> <li>• use far-fetched analogies</li> <li>• or lose his/her train of thought and “get lost.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take the blame yourself. Tell the person: “Something I said must have led you off the subject. What we should be talking about is ...”. (Restate the point.)</li> <li>• In a friendly manner, tell the person that his/her point is interesting but a bit off the subject.</li> <li>• Remind the group that there’s still a lot to cover, and ask if they are ready to move on.</li> </ul>
<i><b>Inarticulate</b></i>	<p>Worker may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack ability to put thoughts into the right words</li> <li>• not have a good command of English</li> <li>• get the idea but can’t convey it</li> <li>• or need more help to understand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say: “Let me repeat that...” and restate the person’s idea in clearer language. Then ask: “Is that a fair statement of your point?”</li> <li>• <b>Don’t</b> say: “What you mean is...”</li> </ul>

<b><i>If a Worker Is:</i></b>	<b><i>Why</i></b>	<b><i>What You Can Do About It</i></b>
<b><i>Definitely wrong</i></b>	Worker may come up with a comment that is obviously incorrect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say: “That’s one way of looking at it.”</li> <li>• Say: “I see your point, but how does that fit with...?” Then explain the true situation.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Involved in a personality clash</i></b>	<p>Two or more people may continually disagree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the material you’re covering</li> <li>• about personal matters and other irrelevant issues</li> <li>• or both.</li> </ul> <p>(This can divide your group into factions.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize points of agreement, and minimize points of disagreement (if possible).</li> <li>• Refocus the group’s attention. “Cut across” the disagreement by asking direct questions about the day’s topic.</li> <li>• Call on someone who isn’t involved in the disagreement.</li> <li>• Frankly ask that personalities be kept out of the discussion.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Gripping</i></b>	<p>Worker may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be a “professional griper”</li> <li>• have a pet peeve</li> <li>• or have a legitimate complaint.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point out that a training session isn’t the place to change policy.</li> <li>• Have another member of the group answer the person’s points.</li> <li>• Offer to discuss the problem with the person privately later.</li> <li>• Say you have to move on because of time pressures.</li> </ul>

<i><b>If a Worker Is:</b></i>	<i><b>Why</b></i>	<i><b>What You Can Do About It</b></i>
<i><b>Reluctant to talk</b></i>	<p>Worker may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be naturally shy</li> <li>• be bored</li> <li>• not care</li> <li>• have a language barrier</li> <li>• be afraid of ridicule</li> <li>• or feel superior.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your action will depend upon what is motivating the person.</li> <li>• If the person seems shy or bored, arouse his/her interest by asking for an opinion.</li> <li>• Get a person nearby to talk. Then ask the quiet person what he/she thinks of the view expressed.</li> <li>• If the quiet person is near you, ask him/her a direct question. You want the person to feel he/she is talking to you, not the group.</li> <li>• Restate your question if necessary, using simple, straightforward language.</li> <li>• Establish an environment that's comfortable for everyone. Make it clear that all ideas will be respected, and that no ridicule will be tolerated.</li> <li>• If the person is the "superior" type, praise his/her knowledge or experience and then ask for an opinion. (Don't overdo this. The rest of the group may resent it.)</li> </ul>

<b><i>If a Worker Is:</i></b>	<b><i>Why</i></b>	<b><i>What You Can Do About It</i></b>
<b><i>Involved in a side conversation</i></b>	<p>Two or more people may be talking about something—whether related to the subject or not. This can distract the group and you. It may happen because they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have other business to take care of</li> <li>• are not interested in the training</li> <li>• or just don't realize they are being disruptive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't embarrass the people involved.</li> <li>• Call on one of those involved by name, and ask him/her an easy question.</li> <li>• Or call on one of those involved by name, restate the last remark made by the group, and ask his/her opinion about it.</li> <li>• Walk over and stand casually near the people who are talking. Don't make your intention so obvious that you embarrass them.</li> </ul>

*Source: AFL-CIO Education Department. Adapted with permission.*